

200 face eviction as Bulakati army land turns into industrial park



Contested. Some of the houses built on Bulakati Army Airstrip land. PHOTO BY CHRISTOPHER KISEKKA

Reason. District leaders say the park will increase revenue and also provide employment opportunities to residents.

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KALUNGU. More than 200 residents, currently occupying land belonging to Uganda People's Defense Forces (UPDF) at Bulakati Village in Lukaya Town Council Kalungu District, have to look for alternative land following a new government plan to turn the area into an industrial Park.

The said land, comprising Mwota Block 181, Kirimya Block 184, Lukaya Block 185, Kalungu Block 145 and Kawanda Block 146 measures 463.43 hectares.

Over time, the army has been in wrangles with squatters, whom it accuses of illegally settling on its land with the latest happening early this year when the Ministry of Defence issued a notice of eviction to the tenants through the district authorities-

instructing all 'encroachers' to vacate the land with immediate effect.

Featuring on Radio Buddu FM in Masaka Town last week, President Museveni, who was on his countrywide radio campaign to convince the public to support a contentious law that allows for compulsory acquisition of private land for public use, said some part of the land, which is vacant, will be used to set up an industrial park.

Establishment of parks

Mr Museveni said old towns like Masaka were established as commercial towns and industries cannot be set up there hence the need to develop independent industrial towns- suggesting that one should be set up at Bulakati.

"We really need such towns (industrial towns) and the government is ensuring that they are established..," Mr Museveni noted.

"I agreed that un-encroached piece of land be turned into an

industrial estate in addition to that of Nabugabo, Masaka District," he added.

The newly elected Kalungu District chairperson, Mr Richard Kyabaggu, said the initiative will benefit the people of Kalungu as it will bring not only more revenue into the district coffers, but also create employment opportunities.

"The people of Kalungu will benefit highly and it is now upon us, the leaders, to follow up the issue so that it becomes a reality," said Mr Kyabaggu during an interview recently.

However, Mr Joseph Ssewungu, the Kalungu West MP who also doubles as the district Democratic Party chairperson, described the proposed industrial park as another 'fictitious pledge' to the people of Kalungu.

"They have continuously told lies about development; they always think about things and fail to materialise them. Where is the industrial park they promised to set up in Bukakkata?" Mr Ssewungu said.

President Museveni noted that government is still looking for investors for the 960 acre piece of land at Bukakkata Industrial Park which was unveiled in 2015.

However, there are still fears from residents occupying part of the Bulakati Army Airstrip land as the President did not say anything about their fate.

Claims of ownership

Residents who claim that they bought the land from Lukaya Town Council authorities who at the time hoodwinked them that they were the rightful custodians of the land, have for a long period of time pleaded to the government and army not to evict them.

Some claim they have occupied part of this land (about 115.8 acres) for more than 30 years.

Recently, Brig Richard Kar-emire, the UPDF spokesperson, said then that the army was not in need of its land "so that it utilises it for its activities" advising Lukaya Town Council to provide alternative land to occupants.